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Bullying Prevention and Intervention

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to making all schools caring and safe places to learn. Our first strategic priority, Positive Culture and Well-being, includes a focus on equity, inclusion, mental health and well-being, safety and acceptance of all staff, students, families and community partners. See our detailed plan at [HWDSB Reimagined](#).

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Our commitment

Every student deserves to feel and to be safe in a school, on the school grounds, on the school bus, and at school events and activities. At Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), we know safety is essential to good learning. Students learn and teachers teach more successfully when schools are safe. If a student misbehaves, the school staff and Principal decide on what steps to take to help the student improve behaviour and social skills.

What is bullying?

Bullying is typically a form of repeated, persistent and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause), fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem or reputation. Bullying sometimes may also occur in a single event or occurrence.

Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance. Not all misbehaviour is bullying. Sometimes children interact in negative ways towards others and must learn how they impact others and be taught socially appropriate behaviour. Kids can misbehave for a whole variety of reasons, including testing limits, being hungry, tired, frustrated or overwhelmed. And while there needs to be consequences for those misdeeds so they learn from their behaviours, there are critical differences between these and the social manipulation that happens in bullying.

Students who participate in bullying may attain or maintain power over others in the school through real or perceived differences. Some areas of difference may be size, strength, age, intelligence, economic status, social status, solidarity of peer group, religion, ethnicity, disability, need for special education, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender or race.

Bullying can take many forms. It can be:

- **Physical** (e.g., hitting, pushing, tripping, stealing or damaging property);
- **Verbal** (e.g., name-calling, threats, humiliating, mocking, or making sexist, racist or homophobic comments);
- **Social** (e.g., excluding others from a group, spreading gossip or rumours, making others look foolish or deliberately damaging another person's friendships);
- **Electronic** (e.g., spreading rumours, images, or hurtful comments using email, cell phones, text messaging, websites or other technology).



Types of bullying

Bullying is most often a repeated behaviour.

The list below includes some types of bullying behaviours but is not a complete list.

Racial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated aggression, exclusion or negative comments directed at a person or persons due to their racial or ethnic background or cultural practices; Repeated teasing or name-calling directed at a person or persons due to their racial or ethnic background or cultural practices.
Religious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated aggression, exclusion or negative comments directed at a person or persons due to their religious beliefs, background, dress code or observances; Repeatedly teasing or name-calling directed at a person or persons due to their religious beliefs, background, dress code or observances.
Sexual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeatedly excluding or mistreating a person or persons due to their gender or sexual orientation; Repeatedly making crude comments about a person or persons' sexual behaviour; Repeatedly making sexist comments or jokes, touching, or grabbing someone in a sexual way; Repeatedly spreading sexual rumours about a person or persons; Repeatedly calling a person or persons gay, fag, lesbian, or other inappropriate names.
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeatedly excluding or mistreating a person or persons due to a disability, perceived disability, or need for special education; Repeatedly making comments or jokes to hurt a person or persons with a disability.
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated hitting, kicking, shoving, beating up, stealing or damaging another person's property
Verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated name-calling, mocking, humiliating, teasing, threatening, racist comments and sexual harassment
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excluding others from the group, gossiping, spreading rumours, making another person or persons look foolish and damaging another person's friendships
Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated use of email, cell phones, text messaging, the Internet and websites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude or damage reputations and friendships

All forms of bullying cause pain and stress to victims and must never be justified or excused as “kids being kids,” “just teasing,” “just joking” or with any other rationalization. Victims are never responsible for being the target of bullying and we all have a responsibility to stop it. We will not be the bullies. We will not allow ourselves to be bullied. We will not be bystanders and we WILL intervene to support one another!

What do families and students need to know about bullying?

Parents and children should never feel alone or suffer the consequences of bullying in silence. You must contact the school Principal or Vice-Principal at your child's school immediately if you have a concern.

Parents can help to deal with bullying by:

1. Making sure you know the policies and have **open dialogue with your children** about what is happening at school, on the bus, and online. Listen and observe!
2. **Work in partnership with the school...be proactive** and call when you have questions and concerns rather than being reactive and calling after you have had several incidents reported to you by your child.
3. **Encourage positive behavior**, value differences, and promote sensitivity towards others with your child.
4. **Discuss regularly with your child about their feelings** about school work, friendships, relationships and their day!
5. **Inform the school of changes in your child's behavior** or circumstances that might affect their behavior or moods/feelings.
6. **Contact the school if bullying has occurred.**

What can students do about bullying?

Students have an important role to play in preventing and stopping bullying. Students in all our schools are expected to show and demonstrate the following behaviours:

1. Value differences and treat ALL others with respect.
2. Not become involved in bullying incidents or be a bully.
3. Tell an adult at school or home immediately about bullying. This is not "being a snitch" or "tattling" when someone is being hurt by a bully.
4. Support other students who have been victims. Don't be a bystander.
5. Talk to teachers and parents about your questions and concerns.
6. Work with other students and staff to help solve incidents of bullying.
7. Participate actively in all discussions about bullying and share ideas and solutions.
8. Be a good role model for younger students and support them if bullying occurs.
9. Remember, your role and responsibility is to work together in stopping bullying so that our schools will continue to be a great place to learn and grow.



How can parents help prevent bullying?

- Encourage your child to be independent, and try not to be overprotective.
- Be a role model and explain you do not tolerate bullying at school, work or the community.
- Behave with kindness, integrity and courage yourself, whenever you have the opportunity. Kids model the behaviors they see at home.
- Teach your child how to make new friends, stay alert to their environment and to be assertive.
- Encourage spare time activities which boost self-confidence.
- Monitor social media on computers and phones regularly with your child.
- Seek help if you are concerned about your child's mental health. The school is great place to start.
- Communicate daily about relationships your child has at school and in the community.
- Support school policies around the Code of Conduct and respectful behaviour at school, home and the community.

How do I know if my child is being bullied?

- A child who is being bullied may display some of the following signs:
- Fear of going to school or feeling ill in the morning
- Skipping school or taking a different route to school
- Going to school early or late
- Problems with school work
- Changes in mood or behavior (e.g. quiet, sullen, withdrawn, argumentative, anxious, avoiding things they usually enjoy, lack of energy, having trouble sleeping)
- Nightmares and disturbed sleep
- A desire to harm themselves or engaging in self-harm
- Low tolerance for frustration
- "Losing" belongings, coming home with damaged belongings
- Unexplained cuts, bruises or other injuries
- Avoiding areas at lunch, the cafeteria or for younger children avoiding recess



What can I do if I suspect my child is the victim of bullying?

- **Ask your child directly.** Probing a seemingly minor incident may uncover something more serious. Children are often afraid or ashamed to tell anyone that they have been bullied.
- **Listen.** Encourage your children to talk about school, social events, other kids in class, and the trip to and from school so you can identify any problems they may be having.
- **Resist being overprotective.** Support your child’s efforts to be more independent. If the bullying is happening on the way to and from school, arrange for the child to get to school with older, supportive children, a group of friends or **take them to school until other interventions can take place.**
- **Teach your child the social skills he/she needs to make friends.** A confident child who has friends is less likely to be bullied. Encourage your child to invite friends to your home.
- **Encourage your child to seek spare-time activities.** Sports are especially good because children learn to work within rules. Also, physical training boosts their self-confidence so they are less likely to be harassed. Your child will also meet other children who may not attend the same school and may make other friends.
- **Teach children ways to resolve arguments** without violent words or actions.
- **Talk about and practice assertiveness skills.** E.g. how to walk confidently, stay alert to their environment, and to verbally stand up for themselves.
- **Seek help.** School Social Workers, Psychologists and Community Children’s Mental Health facilities are available to assist you and your child. Find more details on page 7.
- Encourage your child to make friends with others who are respectful and kind and to end relationships with those who cause pain.

Do’s and don’ts for parents when a child is being bullied

If your child is being bullied, here are some “Do’s and Don’ts” to help you work with your child:

Do’s	Don’ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do contact your child’s teacher or the school Principal to get help! • Do write down how your child is feeling. (Make sure you gather all the information from your child.) • Do tell them to speak confidently and forcefully when telling the bully to leave them alone or not to touch them! • Do work on developing good relationships with a friend, caring adult or classmate. • Do instruct them to walk or run away from the bully. Do not engage in online conversations after a bully has already been told to stop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t advise your child to get into a fight or retaliate in other ways. Never tell your child to hit back or call a person names. • Don’t believe the insults and don’t allow your child to believe that they deserve to be picked on. Reassure your child that they are valued and deserve to be respected and safe! • Don’t think that the bullying will stop if you ignore it. • Don’t advise your child “not to tattle.” It is important to report bullying to an adult!

How do I know that my child is bullying other kids?

- A child who is bullying others may display some of the following signs:
- coming home with items which do not belong to them
- exhibiting aggressive and manipulative behavior with siblings
- exhibiting aggressive and manipulative behavior with parents
- putting others down in conversations
- being unable to play co-operatively
- being cruel to animals
- exhibiting lack of empathy
- befriending other aggressive children

What can I do if I suspect my child is bullying others?

- **Take the problem seriously.** Children who continue to bully others often get into serious trouble in later life. They may also have continuing trouble in their relationships with others.
- **Talk to your child.** Keep in mind that a child who is bullying will often try to blame others.
- **Tell your child that you will not tolerate this kind of behavior.** Discuss with your child the negative impact bullying has on its victims. Praise kindness toward others. Show your child that you value kindness. Teach them ways to resolve conflict without violent words or actions.
- **Arrange for an effective, non-violent consequence.** This should be in proportion with the severity of your child's actions, and his or her age and stage of development. Physical punishment carries the message that "might is right."
- **Establish a few family rules and stick to them.** When children follow rules, be quick to show approval. When they do not, there should be punishment e.g. loss of privilege or reduced spending money. Ensure that your children are not witnessing violent behavior between other family members.
- **Spend some extra quality time with your child.** Look for activities you can share such as sports or hobbies. Try to avoid watching violent television and video games. Too much exposure may increase violent and aggressive behavior.
- **Increase your supervision of your child's activities and whereabouts.** Find out who their friends are and make sure that you know where they are always. Discourage relationships with aggressive peers.
- **Talk to the teacher and or Principal.** Keep in mind that a child who is bullying may try to place the blame on others. Frequent communication with teachers and/or administrators is important to find out how your child is doing in changing his or her behavior.
- **Seek help if you are concerned about your child's mental health.** School Social Workers, Psychologists and Community Children's Mental Health facilities are available to assist you and your child. Your family doctor is also someone to consult.
- **You may contact your School Social Worker or Psychologist through your school Principal.** If you wish to pursue a community Children's Mental Health referral you may do so by calling CONTACT Hamilton at (905)570-8888 or info@contacthamilton.ca

What will happen if my child has been bullying?

HWDSB is committed to building and sustaining a positive school climate for all students, to support their education so that all students can learn and grow to their full potential. The Education Act requires that school boards have measures that lead to consequences for inappropriate behaviours while also supporting students to change those behaviours.

HWDSB uses a progressive discipline model when issuing consequences. Progressive discipline can range from counselling and detentions to suspensions and expulsions, depending on the infraction and circumstances. Schools and school boards must consider mitigating circumstances – such as age, illness, peer pressure, learning profile, etc. – before issuing consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

The circumstances and type of incident may alter the consequence; however, it does not mean that no consequence has occurred. Learn more at: www.hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/safe-schools/progressive-discipline

What is a bystander?

Bystanders are the third group of players.

People who witness acts of bullying must make a choice. They can stand idly by, or look away. They can actively encourage the bully, or join in as one of a bunch of bullies. Or they can use their voice to stop the bully and get help for the victim.

Doing nothing has its own cost. It harms bystanders by leading to fear about getting involved; some will conclude the bullying cannot be stopped. We must always encourage bystanders to help those in need.



Why might bystanders not help?

A bystander to bullying may decide not to intervene or report bullying by saying...

- “The bully is my friend.”
- “It’s not my problem and someone else will report or stop the bullying.”
- “The victim is not their friend.”
- “The victim is a loser.”
- “The victim ‘deserved’ to be bullied.”
- “The bullying will ‘toughen up’ the victim.”
- “They would rather be part of the ‘in group’ than defend the victim.”
- “There is nothing they can do about it.”
- “They don’t want to be a tattler.”
- “They are afraid that they will ‘be next’ if they do anything.”

What can I do if I suspect my child may be a bystander to bullying?

- **Encourage** your child to empathize with the victim (step into their shoes)
- **Help** your child to understand that there is a difference between ‹tattling› (trying to get someone else in trouble) and ‹reporting› (protecting someone who is being or may be harmed)
- **Accompany** your child to the teacher or principal to report what they have witnessed.
- **Encourage** your child to mobilize his/her friends to protect the victim. There is safety in numbers.
- **Explain** to your child that bullying does not ‹toughen people up› but that it can cause real emotional and physical harm, which can be long lasting, and life threatening.
- **Teach** your child that being friends with those who inflict this kind of pain on their peers is not what you want them to do. Encourage them to find friends who value kindness and integrity.
- **Reinforce** your child for accepting responsibility for his/her own behavior.

What if my child does not want to report bullying?

All HWDSB can employ the latest mobile technology to encourage anonymous reporting of bullying and other incidents that may lead to unsafe conditions at our schools. This service, called **Tip Off**, is a way to receive anonymous messages by text, web chat, smartphone app or phone call. An operator gathers information about the tip and shares it with the appropriate school, where Board and school protocols will be followed. Each sender's phone number is scrambled to preserve their anonymity.

Letting students anonymously share information is one way to make schools safer. It is important to note that **Tip Off** will not provide counselling. It can, however, direct students in crisis to 911. It is not a substitute for school policies. Instead, it supports Board policies, such as the requirement that HWDSB have a way to receive anonymous reports of bullying. You can learn more about **Tip Off** at www.hwdsb.on.ca/schools/tipoff. If you have more questions, please contact your school's principal.

Positive Culture and Well-being

Well-being is a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are being met. It is supported through equity and respect for our diverse identities and strengths. Well-being in early years and school settings is about helping children and students become resilient, so that they can make positive and healthy choices to support learning and achievement both now and in the future. (Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education: Discussion Document, 2016, p. 3)

A positive school climate exists when all members of a school community feel safe, supported, and accepted. All schools have programs that promote and support positive behaviours and reflect HWDSB's goal to ensure all schools are great places to learn and grow. All schools identify goals to improve in these areas based on students and staff needs to ensure safety and well-being for all.

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct, which outlines expectations and responsibilities for staff, students, parents, and visitors, is available in each school. The Board [Code of Conduct](#) is available online at www.hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/safe-schools/code-of-conduct

Keeping Our Kids Safe at School (Bill 157)

Board employees who work directly with students are required to respond to incidents that may have a negative impact on school climate. All board employees are required to report to the principal if they become aware that a student may have engaged in an activity for which the student must be considered for suspension or expulsion. Bullying is one of the behaviours for which suspension may be considered. Principals are to contact the parents of victims of such incidences.

Positive Culture and Well Being School Team

Each school has a team that includes input from all staff, students and the community. The team uses data related to the annual student survey on Positive School Climate and parent input on bullying behaviours to monitor and review the effect of school bullying prevention programs. Data may include safe school survey information, suspension and expulsion data, attendance and student comments.

Partnerships with Community Agencies

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board actively pursues community partnerships that will assist schools and communities to work toward eliminating bullying in all of our environments.

How can I learn more?

For more information about HWDSB's Safe Schools and Bullying Policy and Policy Directive please visit our website at www.hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/supports/safe-schools

- Ministry of Education, 2016 [Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education: Fact Sheet for Parents](#)
- Hamilton Public Library: www.hpl.ca
- Canadian Safe Schools Network: www.canadiansafeschools.com
- Ministry of Education www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/publications.html
- [Bullying: We Can All Stop It – A Guide for Parents](#), Ministry of Education, Spring 2013

